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ABSTRACT

To discover whether peer coaching is altering the teacher-supervisor relationship, teachers, supervisors, and staff developers in several states were surveyed concerning principals' attitudes and motivations concerning this innovative approach. For some teachers, peer coaching seems to stimulate transformations in self-perception and relations with supervisors. For others, not much seems different. During discussions with survey participants, three classifications of principal leadership styles emerged; teachers viewed their principals as either neglecters, resisters, or supporters of peer coaching. The first group was motivated by central office expectations; the second resisted peer coaching inservice training in an effort to protect administrative power and authority; and the third group was knowledgeable, involved in the program, and eager to identify problems and seek solutions. Teachers with neglecter principals frequently bypassed the administration and adopted a somewhat paternalistic attitude toward these principals. Teachers with resister principals became creative at releasing each other for class observations without permission from the principal and carried out peer coaching functions in an atmosphere of secrecy. Teachers with supporter principals felt empowered. These teachers experienced an ever-deepening professional relationship with the principal that blurred lines of influence and stressed shared authority and accountability. Implications for strategy decisions based on these findings are summarized. (16 references) (MLH)

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IS PEER COACHING CHANGING SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS?

By

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"I knew that I didn't like the evaluations I got, but I never knew what to ask for. Peer coaching has been valuable in that now I say 'This is what I want you to look for. How can I improve it'?"

Is peer coaching altering the relationship teachers have with their supervisors? As teachers talk more with each other, see more than their own classrooms and think more with colleagues about teaching and learning, are they also regarding and interacting with administrators in different ways?

This line of questioning was put to teachers, supervisors and staff developers in several states. Their comments are provocative and sometimes disturbing. Their experiences suggest several areas for further inquiry and consideration as we continue to design and invite teachers to engage in collegial roles. For some teachers, peer coaching seems to be stimulating transformations in self perception and in changing relationships with their supervisors. For others, not much seems different. What follows is an accounting of some patterns in teacher and supervisor perceptions; speculations about causes and some implications for policy and practice.

WHAT IS PEER COACHING?

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Among those interviewed, peer coaching meant different things and was occurring in a variety of projects and environments, each of which influenced teacher experience and perceptions. Common to all teachers interviewed in this serendipitously arranged series of discussions were practices of pre-conference, classroom observation and post-conference. What differed were the coaching methods, depth of skills, time in coaching, numbers of teachers involved (whole school or just a few) and levels (elementary or secondary). The teachers had experienced one of two models of coaching: (1) technical coaching, in which the major premise is that teachers will improve teaching performance provided objective data, is given in a nonthreatening and supportive climate and (2) collegial coaching, in which the major premise is that teachers will acquire career-long habits of self initiated reflection and self improvement, provided opportunity to develop skills in doing so. (See Garmston; Educational Leadership, February, 1987, for further distinctions between these models). Cognitive Coaching, a collegial model specifically focused on teacher cognition, was the coaching vehicle for over half the teachers interviewed. In the discussion that follows, no attempt has been made to account for such differences as time spent in coaching or the coaching models used. Some differences in the perceptions of elementary and secondary teachers, however, will be noted.

PROFESSIONAL IMAGES

> *"One may have known a thing many times and acknowledged it,*
> *one may have willed a thing many times and attempted it;*
> *and yet it is only by the deep inward movements, only by the*
> *indescribable emotions of the heart, that for the first time*
> *your are convinced that what you have known belongs to you,*
> *that no power can take it from you; for only the truth which*
> *edifies is truth for you."*
>
> Soren Kierkegaard

Some teachers spoke about peer coaching with the passion of spiritual converts. They said they had been awakened. They said it had helped them to realize their perceptions of teaching were "valid." They said they now had access to and trusted their tacit knowledge. They said that their personal confidence and competence had grown and that out of this, they felt like new teachers, seeing students, the school, colleagues and their principal with fresh eyes, new understandings and expanded responsibilities.

> *"It feels like my brain is actually better at decision making when I am teaching. I'm not sure what it is...it's like I have more alternatives, a larger repertoire of ideas I can use in different situations."*

> *"I have more confidence and a willingness to say, 'This is what I believe, this is what I have done, and this is why I have done it'."*

> *"What a change! I'm giving myself permission to try things."*

Principals, and staff developers too, noted the transformational quality that some teachers were experiencing. "It's like they've been empowered. It's amazing. It's almost visible - like you can reach out and touch it." Greater perseverance in testing new ideas in their classrooms, more teacher initiated talk about teaching with other teachers and administrators; more experimentation, risk taking, buoyancy and enthusiasm about teaching were noted.

Interestingly, teachers for whom peer coaching had stimulated such transforming experiences, while they worked in different schools and lived in several states, were, without exception, elementary teachers.

Peer coaching, particularly collegial forms of peer coaching (Garmston, 1988 a), can powerfully engage each of these five dynamics. Two of these, experimentation and professional dialogue with peers, have been previously found to be elements in the most successful staff development programs (Little 1982) and found to be stimulated by peer coaching. (Sparks 1986). But schools are complex and dynamic ecosystems. Like delicately taut spider webs, to pluck a single strand sends vibrations through the entire system. Changes in any part of the system, such as amount of teacher talk with peers, teachers observing others teach, teachers planning together, can change other parts of the system, including teachers' sense of professional identity.

IDENTITY LEVEL INTERVENTIONS.

In therapy we know that of all the possible levels of intervention, an intervention at the level of identity is the most powerful, the most far-reaching, and carries the most unpredictable consequences. Peer coaching appears to be causing, for some teachers, a change in identity. How does this work? Consider the following therapeutic intervention scale:

4) Identity

3) Beliefs

2) Behavior patterns

1) Behaviors

For example, an intervention at the lowest point on this scale might be to get a person to install a new behavior, say washing their hands. At level two, several related behaviors or a behavior pattern might be taught; returning the soap to the soap dish, drying hands, tidying the wash area before leaving.

A third and far more powerful level of intervention is to stimulate changes in a person's beliefs. This is more difficult to do since the processes of changing beliefs, unlike behaviors, are less visible and happen more from the inside. However, this is an intervention of greater consequence, for now, with the belief that "cleanliness is desirable" or "dirt breeds disease" persons will seek out and invent behaviors congruent with these beliefs. The behaviors become self generating and not dependent on outside intervention.

Finally, at level four, as perceptions of personal identity are changed, congruent but unpredictable beliefs and behaviors may emerge. From a "who I am is a clean person" may come volunteering to clean up the neighborhood, helping others learn the values of cleanliness, interest in researching the unknown relationships between dirt and disease and formulating ways to improve the environment.

For some teachers, peer coaching is a level four intervention. They report that "clinical supervision" (evaluation) is intimidating. Their clinical supervision experiences have helped to form images of a helpful professional as one who reinforces, identifies errors and gives advice. Their approach to personal growth has been relatively passive and dependent. By contrast in Cognitive (peer) Coaching projects, teachers learn to withhold evaluation in post-observation conferences so that teacher self evaluation takes place. Through the practice of withholding praise and criticism, asking open-ended questions that cause teachers to think about their instructional decision making, and probing for specificity, teachers may experience themselves in a different professional light...or identity...not as one who gets feedback about what is effective and not effective in their teaching, but as one who autonomously and consciously develops those insights. But, real encouragement to develop reflective teachers, in many districts, has not been a high priority.

AN EMERGING FOCUS

For the past two decades, staff development work and teacher supervision has, for the most part, been focused on the lowest two levels of intervention. We have taught, reinforced and evaluated the behaviors of teaching; wait time, praise, anticipatory set, closure. Some supervisors have conveyed an impression that there are a limited number of "best" ways to teach or some "right" ways to organize instruction and that the teachers job is to (1) learn what those methods are and (2) carry them out in a careful replication of the model they have been taught. With the dreary drone of year in, year out consistent adherence to such policies of imitation, we do, of course, like water dripping on a stone, ultimately affect a teacher's sense of professional identity.

Such limiting visions of what constitute effective teaching run counter to the findings of researchers like Shulman (1987) Saphier, and Gower (1982) Jones, et al (1987), Peterson (1988), and others who are deepening our understandings of teaching and learning as intricately complex processes. At the extreme end, narrow views convey an image of teacher's work as labor (Darling-Hammond and Pease, 1983). Within this metaphor, management sets quotas, standards and monitors accordingly. Workers comply, protect their rights and seek stature through salary and bargaining equity. That identity becomes like a skin within which all their perceptions, thinking and behavior choices function. Professionals, however, make decisions. They have a broad base of knowledge and skills and make decisions about when to apply these. Professionals have identity as persons who are cognitively autonomous. They self monitor, are critically self reflective, self prescriptive and feel responsibility for the total enterprise. To the degree that peer coaching is helping teachers achieve these ends, and to the degree that these are shaping new professional identities for teachers, then peer coaching does seem to be changing relationships between teacher and administrator. But principal style and attitudes toward peer coaching appear to be important variables contributing to teachers' professional sense of identity and ultimately, to teacher-administrator relationships.

PRINCIPAL STYLE AND MOTIVATIONS ABOUT COACHING

Three classifications of principal leadership style toward coaching emerged in these discussions with teachers, staff developers and principals. In some schools teachers described principals as **neglecters** of peer coaching. In other settings teachers regarded principals as **resisters** and in some schools, principals were seen by teachers to be active **supporters** of peer coaching activities. Figure 1 shows relationships between principal motivations regarding peer coaching, three distinct principal behavior patterns, and resulting teacher behaviors and impact on relationships. The reader is invited to reflect on the display of these relationships in light of their own experiences and to consider, if true, the implications for the preparation and inservice of supervisors and the design and implementation of staff development efforts.

In general, teachers comments about principal motivation seemed echos of the RAND (Berman and McGlaughlin, 1977 a) findings regarding the impact that institutional motivation has on permanent change. In that study, leaders who got their schools involved in projects primarily to solve locally identified concerns had greater success in reaching project goals and achieving long range faculty behavior change than were leaders who got involved simply because project funds were available. In these interviews, participants were of the opinion that motivations and leadership style regarding peer coaching were closely intertwined. What were these behaviors and motivations?

NEGLECTERS

In Figure 1 it can be seen that in some schools teachers described their principal as not having much interest in teachers' peer coaching activities. The principal, they said, seemed to be pursuing peer coaching because someone else expected it of him or her. They described the

principal as being mildly motivated by "teachers ought to be doing inservice" and that teachers were being "good employees" through their participation.

In these schools where teachers perceived the principal to be driven by a sense of duty to meet expectations they presumed others (like centrally directed staff development personnel) had for them, they often talked of their principals as if they were technicians carrying out important directives, but with limited internal locus of control.

These principals rather consistently lacked knowledge of operational details and were unable to articulate the goals or coaching protocols other than in the most general terms. Scheduling for coaching was not overseen by the principal, nor was leadership for the program evident. As one teacher said, "A spoonful of leadership is offered when a cupful is needed."

RESISTERS

In other schools teachers regarded the principal as being resistant to peer coaching goals and activities. In these settings, teachers saw the principal's behaviors toward peer coaching as part of a pattern to protect the principal's power and authority within the school. Other opinions about principal motivation were offered. Several staff development specialists believed that principal resistance came from insecurity related to being uninformed about good teaching practices. "Teachers have been learning and growing faster than principals. Some principals are just plain scared." One district level administrator said, "I don't think a lot of principals really want teachers to do this. That's my gut level reaction because it is never a priority except with our really outstanding principals."

Principals were perceived as actively resisting peer coaching when they would not allow teachers to attend inservice sessions, or when they denied the use of substitute teachers for

release time, or when they chastised teachers that their first job was to be with students. Sometimes innuendos were sent that activities that removed teachers from direct student contact were considered unprofessional. Sometimes peer coaching was talked about in derogatory terms by these principals or in ways that assigned very little value to coaching activities as compared with other more important teacher activities.

SUPPORTERS

But teachers working with principals supportive of peer coaching characterized them not as being motivated by central office expectations or concerns with positional power, but by a restless urge to identify problems, seek solutions and take action.

These principals were very knowledgeable and involved in the program at their schools. Teachers said principals frequently recruited teachers into coaching, provided faculty meeting time to model or provide practice on coaching skills, and sometimes took a participant role on a coaching team. In some schools, supporter principals had organized peer coaching committees to monitor the program and search for and solve problems. Systems for releasing teachers to observe and conference were well organized, and clearly understood by all. Teachers in these schools were encouraged and acknowledged for their participation.

So, from the perspective of three groups; teachers, staff developers, and even principals, the descriptions of principal leadership in peer coaching as being either neglecting, resisting or supporting seemed to approximate the truth regarding the dynamic and difficult roles principals play in managing school programs. But what connections existed, if any, between the principal's style, motivation, leadership behaviors and the relationships teachers felt they had with their principals?

THE IMPACT OF PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION AND STYLE ON RELATIONSHIPS

Perceptions of changes in the supervisor-teacher relationship, where they occurred, came primarily from elementary teachers (more than from their administrators) and in settings where the principal or direct supervisor had been an active supporter of peer coaching. For this article, far more elementary than secondary teachers were interviewed, and far more teachers than administrators. All of what follows, except where specifically noted, is based on the perceptions of elementary teachers.

"NEGLECT IS NICE"

Teachers reported that if they couldn't have principal support, they'd rather have neglect than resistance. In Figure 1 it can be seen that in schools where the principal played the role of a neglecter, teachers talked of how they "took things in their own hands" and bypassed the administration in setting targets for coaching frequency, style and content. They adopted, sometimes, almost a paternalistic attitude about their principal and openly talked of ways they could help the principal grow.

- *"I think we need to be careful that we let Judy know we are working with her, instead of against her."*
- *"I have a strong awareness of the skills I've developed to bring about change and am conscious of applying these with my principal. Instead of just grumbling or turning my back and saying 'oh well,' I am supporting him in developing new understandings."*

RESISTANCE ISOLATES

When principals were perceived as actively resisting peer coaching, those few teachers who stayed engaged with coaching did so through energies devoted to circumventing principal interests. Without informing the principal, they became creative at releasing each other from class to observe. They designed large group lessons a third teacher could lead, they met at lunch or at prep periods for conferring, and they sometimes used video in place of actual observations. These behaviors, within a context of partnership with an administrator are laudable, desirable indicators of autonomous contributions to a school program. In schools with resister principals, however, these activities were carried out almost with an air of secrecy. Teachers reported efforts to avoid principal contact and discussion. In schools with resister principals, much less time was spent in open faculty room dialogue about coaching and teaching. The principal, in these schools, took on the persona of the "enemy" in some teachers' eyes.

SUPPORT EMPOWERS

In schools where the principal actively supported peer coaching by encouraging teachers to participate, providing substitutes, helping with scheduling, talking about coaching in faculty meetings, or taking classes so teachers could observe, teacher perceptions about their relationship with the principal were very different from the perceptions of teachers with neglecter or resister principals:

- *"I now come to him as an equal - equal problems, equal abilities, equal disabilities, equal 'I don't know what's going on.' The peer coaching has reinforced that."*

- *"I think peer coaching has strengthened our voices as individuals and as a group with the administrator. We feel stronger and feel validated on what we know about instruction."*

- *"I'm telling her things to look for in my formal evaluation. I've never done that before!"*

- *"It increases my confidence, so that when the principal comes in for an observation, I am more confident because I am actually more competent."*

Several teachers in schools with supporter principals talked of taking on concerns which were formerly the exclusive province of the principal. A teacher in the Olympia School District in Washington where peer coaching is one part of a broader Building Growth Planning Team process (Garmston, 1988 b) said: "I believe it's the principal's job to make sure teachers are doing our jobs. I told my principal 'we both know that Teacher X is not doing a good job. I'd like you to work with Teacher X to make sure he improves'."

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, Sparks (1986), and Sparks and Bruder (1987), studied the effects of peer coaching when it was implemented by all teachers in two elementary schools with supportive principals. Later two intermediate schools were studied in an identical manner. These studies sought to learn the effects of peer coaching on teacher collegiality and experimentation. Throughout the interviews, teachers (and supervisors) made several unsolicited references to teacher relationships with supervisors.

One elementary school principal and nearly half the teachers volunteered that greater staff cohesiveness had occurred as a result of the project. When asked what major change or benefit for the principal had occurred, in one school nearly one third of the teachers volunteered that the principal "seems more mellow, friendly and positive."

Similar perceptions were reported at the intermediate schools. At one school where the principal also served on the coaching team, half the teachers said it was beneficial to be in a truly collegial and egalitarian setting with the principal, and that they felt closer to the principal as a result. Over half the teachers reported general positive changes in the assistant principal, including feelings of increased collegiality, perceptions of greater assistant principal sympathy for teacher responsibilities and an increased confidence in the assistant principal's ability to evaluate them fairly.

In these studies and in a number of other teacher and principal interviews, a tentative picture emerges in which it appears that in settings where supervisor interest and support of peer coaching is high, teachers in general feel an ever deepening professional relationship with the principal; a relationship in which lines of influence are blurred and authority and accountability are shared.

IMPLICATIONS

Teachers in these interviews had experienced different models of peer coaching, at different depths and in a variety of projects and contexts. Some teachers, notably elementary teachers with actively supportive principals, reported transformations in their identities as teachers. Where such shifts in professional self concept occurred, so did major shifts in perception regarding their responsibilities to the school at large, their relationships with the principal and the sense of joy about their work.

Once teachers "made decisions" about new professional identities, psychological needs for consistency seemed to create powerful drives to behave congruently with those decisions (Cialdini, 1984). This may explain the powerful and persistent energies and behaviors the "new-found-identity-teachers" devoted to deepening their personal learning through peer

coaching and contributing to other forms of school improvement. It does, however, raise an important question.

Once teachers have changed the way they view themselves, can they be changed back? Can the Genie be put back in the bottle? In these interviews, some teachers reported receiving a resister administrator after having worked with a principal who supported collegial interaction. Unhappiness and struggle followed. Generally, teachers were unwilling to accept leadership which limited the new concepts of his or her professional selves.

At least three implications for strategy decisions are suggested by these findings. First, districts might withhold support for collegial efforts like peer coaching, staff planning and problem solving in schools where the principal maintains a controlling, personal power-protecting position. Resources allocated in such settings can be counterproductive to the status quo of administrator-teacher relationships that, within the confines of present definitions, are working. Instead, districts might provide support, staff development personnel, release time for teachers and outside consultants only to schools where principals embrace goals of empowering teachers and sharing leadership.

Second, districts might deliberately seek and design interventions capable of producing identity level transformations. Regard this as a legitimate goal in school improvement efforts. When teachers define themselves as capable, concerned, problem seeking, problem solving, creative, and responsible professionals, a torrent of energy is released for students. Since "the best and brightest people will gravitate toward organizations that foster personal growth,. . . and the best people want ownership and the manager's new role is that of coach, teacher and mentor" (Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1985), and since in Frymier's view (1987) "it is the bureaucratic structure of the work place that determines what professionals do far more than personal abilities, professional training, or previous experiences," change efforts that facilitate the

development of fresh professional identity and that restructure work roles and relationships make inordinate good sense.

Third, and related to the above, consider developing a teacher impact statement modeled along Goodman's ideas but unique to each district and school. This statement would reflect and be a natural outgrowth of an adopted mission and beliefs statement. Then, study each proposed innovation, including those that come from outside the district, and reject or modify those that fail to positively impact teachers' continuing sense of professional identity.

Finally, in considering peer coaching and other collegial endeavors, perhaps school systems should candidly ask themselves the question....do we really want autonomous teachers who practice problem seeking and problem solving, who are concerned with educational results beyond their own students, and who are creative, articulate and energized? Like the hypothetical curriculums which call for student critical thinking, but teach by rote, such ideals are frequently easier to talk about than live with.

HOW PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION AND LEADERSHIP STYLE MAY AFFECT THE TEACHER-PRINCIPAL RELATIONSHIP

	NEGLECTER	RESISTER	SUPPORTER
PRINCIPAL MOTIVATION	Compliance with perceived expectations of central office. Fear of conflict.	Protect positional power.	School based instructional problem seeking and problem solving.
PRINCIPAL BEHAVIORS	Aware of program. Leaves teacher to work out own arrangements. Withholds leadership.	Sends negative innuendos. Makes it difficult for teacher to schedule observations. Withholds resources.	Encourages teacher to discuss activities. May coach and be coached. Provides for scheduling and substitutes. May take class so teacher can observe.
TEACHER BEHAVIOR	Initiates planning, organizing. Takes things in own hands. Leads the principal in educational matters.	Finds ways to "go around" principal.	More teacher initiated discussion about instruction.
AFFECT ON RELATIONSHIP	Non-existant. Teachers are condescending toward principal.	Principal becomes more isolated from teachers. Principal loses power. Principal loses teacher respect.	Principal and teacher are colleagues. Mutual influence on instructional decisions.

FIGURE 1

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